



Open letter to Jenni Minto MSP, Minister for Public Health and Women's Health

Slow progress in hearing care: where are we, two years after the Independent Review of Audiology Services in Scotland?

25 August 2025

Dear Minister

Today marks two years since the publication of the Independent Review of Audiology Services in Scotland (IRASS), which identified “multiple systemic problems” in the provision of hearing services across NHS Scotland. Yet despite this hard-hitting report, which demanded urgent action from the Scottish Government, many children and adults are still missing out on the support they so urgently need.

Most of us will experience deafness in our lives. Access to accurate and prompt audiology services is critical to good outcomes – particularly for young children, where delays or inaccuracies in testing can have lifelong impacts.

From birth to age five, children's brains develop more than at any time of life. Delayed hearing assessments and inadequate care mean that some babies and young children will have unidentified deafness and lack support in this crucial period. This can severely impact a child's ability to acquire language – whether spoken, signed or a combination of both. We know that hundreds of children under the care of NHS Lothian had delays in assessment and support; and sadly, this will be the case across Scotland.

For adults, the implications of delayed access to audiology services are also profound – limiting people's ability to work, socialise, and live well. More than half a million adults in Scotland could benefit from hearing aids, yet data from the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) indicates that only 2 in 5 UK adults who could benefit currently use hearing aids. Untreated hearing loss can result in social isolation.

Research has linked social isolation in older adults to an increased likelihood of developing dementia. It may also be linked to an increased risk of falls.

While the Scottish Government committed to implementing all the Independent Review's recommendations, progress has been slow, and external input from the third sector and people with lived experience sidelined.

In short, the action taken by the Scottish Government to boost services has yet to deliver the transformative change so urgently needed – while other recommendations from the Independent Review remain partially or wholly incomplete.

Pockets of good practice do exist. NHS Tayside Audiology service has taken proactive action to considerably reduce its waiting times for routine adult appointments. It has also become the first audiology service in Scotland to achieve national accreditation on improving quality standards. All Health Boards across Scotland must be supported by the Scottish Government to provide the high-quality service that audiology staff want to deliver.

We know that audiology services are facing barriers with recruiting new staff and addressing waiting times. Information obtained by the National Deaf Children's Society and RNID reveals that waiting times for audiology services in Scotland are unacceptably long. In some cases, children who should be seen within 42 days were waiting up to 600 days – posing a serious risk to early identification and intervention. One parent of a deaf child recently described herself as “absolutely exhausted and totally broken by the experience” of getting her child the support he needed – with delays accessing support impacting on her child's education and confidence.

Adults report routine waits of 6-18 months from audiology referral to initial assessment – with some people waiting longer. People have also reported that requests for follow-up appointments include waiting times of more than a year – risking impacts like interrupted education and forced early retirement.

We believe that the Scottish Government must equip audiology services with the resources, workforce, and leadership necessary to deliver the best possible outcomes for deaf children and adults.

To achieve this, we urge action in three key areas:

1. **Evidence of independent safety checks:** Services must be held to high standards, with independent experts involved in reviewing staff competency and service performance.
2. **Clear accountability for workforce planning:** The Scottish Government must ensure a sustainable pipeline for Scotland's audiology workforce. This should include the reinstatement of an undergraduate university course to train new audiologists.
3. **Transparent reporting:** Routine and transparent reporting of audiology referral to treatment waiting times for Health Boards must be introduced, alongside clear targets for improvement.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with the Scottish Government to achieve this.

Without more ambitious and decisive action from the Scottish Government, however, we fear that the current system will continue to fall short.

When every moment counts, it is time for action – not words.

Your sincerely,

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Lucy Mulvagh, Director of Policy, Research and Impact, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)

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